

Back in the 1930s, Mary Immaculate played a small role in the conversion, and the eventual reconversion, of Richard Vincent. The editor discovered this account on his personal website, and reproduces it with permission:

*Cyrus Davis was the pastor of the small Southside Baptist Church where I attended Sunday School in my youth. (It is still there today.) I remember a special pair of pants and shirt that I wore only on important occasions, including going to church. Our teacher handed out pretty pictures and had us place a star on a attendance board as we were told stories of some little boy called Jesus. People sang songs (my Uncle Jessie played all kinds of instruments and wrote songs for the church.) It seemed that the adults enjoyed making a lot of noise but I just didn't understand it all.*

*As I grew older, I was urged to read the Bible, especially by Mrs. Music, a wonderful "old" lady who read the Bible daily and remarked that, each time she read it, it brought an entire new meaning to her. Mrs. Music had known me all my life and was the grandmother of one of my classmates, Jimmy Waite. I started the Bible several times with the Book of Matthew but barely got past the beginning (genealogy) before I lost interest. I just didn't understand it all.*

*During the "great depression" we all moved to a farm west of Kirksville. I would sometimes be given a dime to attend the Saturday afternoon movies in town. The movie usually consisted of a cartoon, a Lowell Thomas News Reel, a main feature, and a movie serial that continued from week to week. One Saturday I saw a jungle feature of some sort where the natives, dressed in ceremonial garb, danced around a campfire that burned an offering to God. That really impressed me! I returned home to the farm and, one day, I "stole" a small slice of meat from the smokehouse, went down to a waterless creek on the farm, built a tiny campfire in the creek, placed the slice of meat in the fire and "danced" around the fire making a noise like a good Baptist. It vented my emotions and made me feel good but I never did it again. I just didn't understand it all.*

*Everyone in Kirksville seemed to be Baptist. I never heard of Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ or Catholic. I assumed that everyone in the world was Baptist. When I entered the Marine Corps during World War II, I was asked my religion ... I said Baptist but the "recorder of the facts" entered Protestant. That was a new word for me ... was that a new name for Baptist? I just didn't understand it all.*

*I didn't realize it at the time but Kirksville did have a Catholic Church and I went by it frequently, assuming it was Baptist. When my boss, **Joe Merlo**, died as a result of an auto accident, I went to his funeral at that church. I experienced a new kind of "worship service" and was thoroughly impressed ... especially by the Sign of the Cross. After Joe's funeral, I went to his grave many times and walked around his grave making the Sign of the Cross over his grave ... it made me feel I was doing something for him. Joe, who immigrated to the US as a young man, once told me that he had studied for the priesthood in Italy but I had no idea what the "priesthood" could be in the Baptist Church. I just didn't understand it all.*

*Moving around in the Marines made me aware that there were many Protestant churches as well as several who were not even Christian. I went to several Protestant churches on a seeking mission but the Catholic Church still evaded me. One Sunday, while I attended my second trimester at Oberlin College in Ohio, I listened for about 90 minutes as a missionary minister preached on the "oppression" of his ministry in South America by the local Catholics. I decided to look at these Catholics and see why they were so troublesome or, at least, see why this minister seemed so critical of them. I was beginning to understand a tiny part of it.*

*The following trimester I was transferred to Purdue University to study Electrical Engineering. A heavy class load kept me busy. One Sunday I was sleeping in until noon when a classmate across the hall came in my room and read the riot act to me for not going to church .. at least on Easter! Then my good friend, who lived in another dormitory and seemed to disappear for a time every Sunday morning, turned out to be a Catholic. With his help, I began my inquiry into the Catholic Church. My understanding began to grow.*

*My fourth trimester at Purdue ended my junior year of college and I had my first Summer break from studies since I started in the Fall of 1944 at LPI in Ruston, Louisiana. I had completed three years of college in two years time, the war had ended, I was commissioned as an officer in the Marine Corps and, finally, I had a Summer off. I attended Mass at the Catholic Church in Kirksville and read a lot of material about the Catholic Church. By the end of Summer break, I had decided that the things I had been seeking were presented by the Catholic Church.*

*Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all." (John 18:37-38)*

*What is Truth? For Christians, Jesus is the Truth but there is more to be asked when seeking a church home ... what is the truth expressed in the teachings of that body? It seemed to me that Jesus, as the Truth, is expressed in the Bible and all true Christians should be following that Ultimate Truth as given to us by the Lord, Himself. Then, why so many different groups that are in conflict in their teaching? Why do they attack each other ... some more than others? Why do some small, independent bodies claim that they had the true truth? Surely, if Jesus established his church (singular) on earth, as he said, then there should be a body which was established at that moment and that remains today. Surely, that body would be a well organized institution that, as much as individual human nature allowed, would function as Christ had intended!*

*The things that attracted me to the Catholic Church was several items that I had felt throughout my life, namely:*

*The Mass presented a feeling of real Worship of God rather than a social visit with friends and attacks on other denominations (or sometimes on individuals within the church itself.)*

*Jesus had said: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19) The word "church" was singular (not plural) and the Catholic Church had persisted for 1400 years as the only Christian body until the Reformation era.*

*Hand picked by Jesus, Peter was the recognized and undisputed head of the new group that carried on the ministry and example of Jesus, the Christ.*

*It was quite logical that for unity in teaching, liturgy and purpose, the institution of a valid leadership should be established to follow Peter.*

*The church offered sacraments to its members that carried special blessings of God. This is especially true of the Eucharist (Holy Communion), which I had never heard of before. This sacrament was to become my lifeline in the future.*

*So, when I returned to Purdue in the Fall of 1946, I received instructions in the church, was baptized, received my first Communion and was confirmed at St. Boniface Catholic Church in Lafayette, Indiana. The priests there were in the Franciscan Order, which would have a strong influence in my future actions*

*Richard Vincent*

[pascent2@airmail.net](mailto:pascent2@airmail.net)

In addition, the editor received this email from Mr. Vincent

... I did study for the priesthood in the Franciscan Order [OFM] in the 1950's but returned to lay life due to what was then considered a health problem but now I am convinced it was an allergy from something I encountered while I was at the old mission San Luis Rey out of Oceanside, CA. From 1970 to 1997 I was a founding member, ordained a minister and served as an Elder in a Dallas church chartered by a group in Los Angeles that started in 1968. In 1997 I resigned all titles and activities from that body and became reconciled with the Catholic Church. A copy of my autobiography, "A Journey to the Light" was given to the Public Library, Historical Society and Truman University in Kirksville.

...I was born and raised in Kirksville. World War II took me away and I never lived there again but I still have relatives there. The wall in Memorial Park has my brother Oland's [who died while a prisoner of the Japanese] and my name as the 3rd and 4th names in the upper left corner of the World War II panel that shows names of those who served....

I reside in Dallas at St. Joseph's Residence, an assisted living facility. I am now working on my 80th year. Details are in the "Richard's Habitat" section of my website.

Just finished reading your site about Mary Immaculate Parish. Very interesting and well done!!! It brought out strong memories of my youth in Kirksville. Although I had no idea what a Catholic Priest was at that point in time, I do remember during prohibition my father making a remark to some friends about a Catholic Priest being a real good guy who enjoyed joining them for a drink [could it have been Fr. Mac Tighe??]. My dad ... belonged to the Elks which was next door to the Sojourners Library where the Historical Society is now located. The Elks had their charter revoked later due to excessive drinking and gambling. I sometimes went with him to the Elks club.

My first visit to a Catholic church was when my boss, Joe Merlo, died just before WWII started. It was at that time I was so impressed by the sign of the cross. I did not know what was going on but I knew I liked it. I was 17 at the time. While in the Marines I remember hearing about the church burning in 1945. While home during Summer break in 1947 I attended Mary Immaculate -- I think it was in the basement while the church was being rebuilt. I was baptized at St. Boniface Church in Lafayette, Indiana, just before graduation in June 1947.

Thank you for writing.

Richard

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